National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Zion National Park

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Zion National Park Fire Management

East Mesa Prescribed Fire Stops Wildland Fire

On August 1, a wildland fire was reported near the eastern boundary of Zion National Park within the area of the East Mesa Prescribed Fire (Rx). A wildland engine from Zion, one from the state and a local VFD responded to the Lemmon Fire and found a large ponderosa pine on fire. The burned top had fallen out of the tree, but due to the recent prescribed fire conducted in the area, was not able to spread. The firefighters dropped the ponderosa snag and were then easily able to extinguish the fire. Had the top of the tree fallen in an area that had not been treated, the fire could have spread to surrounding vegetation and threatened the park boundary and private lands and numerous structures adjacent to the park.

The two year, 2,300 acre East Mesa Rx project was completed this past spring (May 2008). The area been previously identified as one of the six original wildland urban interface "Focus Areas" located in the Color Country Interagency Fire Management Area that required some type of immediate fuel reduction treatment to protect communities/properties at risk from the threat of wildland fire. The objectives of the East Mesa Rx were to provide protection for surrounding property and structures, reduce fuel loading and restore fire to its natural role in the ecosystem.

This is a good example of how a prescribed fire treatment can stop or slow the movement of a wildland fire by reducing or eliminating the fuels the fire needs. The treated area also allows firefighters the time and safer conditions they need to be able to contain and extinguish the fire.

The East Mesa Rx will benefit both Zion National Park and the landowners and residents of the East Zion area. The burn has provided them with a lowered risk from wildland fire, but will also benefit the plants and animals of the fire-adapted ponderosa pine ecosystem.